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STOKES, BRENDA PUGH. Umbo Suite. (Videotaped choreography) (1973) Directed by: Miss Virginia Moomaw. Pp. 16

The dance Umbo Suite was made for five dancers with the purpose of making spatial design. It was inspired by "Umbo", modular furniture, which comes in molded pieces that are joined by the creator in whatever shapes he wishes to construct. It is molded in the following pieces: curved elbows, straights, T-shaped, corner returns, circular table tops, cylindrical table bases, and molded circular chairs.

From the shaped modules and from the word "Umbo" come the thematic material for the dance. Floor patterns and body movements combined with the overall stage design are based on the particular shape used for motivation.

No props or set are used. The costumes are white tank top unitards with orange and brown linear designs. Accompaniment is a combination of silence, percussion, and Edgar Varese's "Octandre". Lighting is general with two special overhead spots which raise and lower in intensity throughout the work.

In turning subject matter into movement, with the main emphasis on spatial design, the problem of grouping dancers effectively was faced. Group dynamics became the main concern of the choreographer while working within the framework of designing shapes. Kinetic motivation for movement, focus, numbers, and directions were compositional devices that helped the choreography achieve its purpose.

UMBO SUITE  
"

by

Brenda Pugh Stokes  
"

A Thesis Submitted to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro  
July, 1973

Approved by

Virginia McOmaw  
Thesis Adviser

## APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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Oral Examination  
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Norman McGee

July 19, 1973  
Date of Examination

OCTANDRE

by

Edgar Varese

Arrangement of Music for Choreography

Section I	Silence, 3 Minutes
Section II	First Movement
Section III	Second Movement and Silence, 30 Seconds
Section IV	Silence, 2 Minutes
Section V	Third Movement and First Movement

Publisher: G. Ricordi and Company: New York, New York.

Recording: EMS -- 401

448282

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## GROUP DYNAMICS IN CHOREOGRAPHY

The problem of grouping or group patterns was the most difficult part of the choreography of Umbo Suite. The choreographer learned that it is deadly to work with group shapes without regard to coping with the problem inherent in this whole idea: the lack of dynamic quality while a shape is being made and held long enough for the eye of the beholder to perceive.

It was the purpose of this study to create a piece of choreography and in so doing to study the aspect of grouping dancers, the inherent problems in grouping and ways at which effective group patterns may be derived, as well as pointers for evaluating such groupings.

The dance Umbo Suite for five dancers had as its intent to make interesting spatial design using group shapes. It then became the task of the choreographer to envision movement and shapes which would allow the spatial design element to predominate in the dance. Since design in space is most important, the dancers are used to achieve linear relationship without regard for emotion. Getting into shapes and out of them becomes the focus of the dance work.

The idea for the dance came from an interest in modular furniture and acquaintance with one such brand, "Umbo" by Directional of New York. The modules which vary in shape and



size, have many constructional configurations yielding numerous design possibilities for decorative as well as functional furniture.

The dance fell into a logical structure in accordance with the breakdown of the four basic shapes in which "Umbo" is designed: cylindrical, curved, linear, and round. A dance section was made from thematic material based on each of these four shapes and comprised the first four sections of the dance. Section V was a combination of all previously used movement themes in juxtaposition to each other.

Each of the five dancers had identical linear stripes of their white, flare-legged unitard in colors of deep brown and orange. The design on the pants leg had orange horizontal stripes of one inch width placed evenly around the thigh, knee, and bottom of the leg. The one inch brown stripes bisected each of these orange segments in a perpendicular fashion; the top and bottom stripe were drawn at the front and back of the dancer's leg while the middle one was off-centered. The brown and orange stripes went in a spiral around the dancer's torso on the tank top. The colors used for costuming are three of those used in producing the furniture, "Umbo."

A combination of silence, percussion, and Edgar Varèse's "Octandre" was used to accompany Umbo Suite. Section I is performed in silence as well as part of the Section III. Section IV is done to a rhythmic beat on a wood block and a twenty-four inch Chinese gong, while music accompanies

Sections II, V, and the first part of Section III.

As content and form merged into dance an overriding problem began to recur. The problem, concisely stated, was in the grouping of the five dancers, and it appeared in several discernable ways.

Dynamic problems concerning the group were the first to be experienced. Since group shape in spatial design was the predominating motivation for this work, even though lovely and expressive shapes began to develop, all of them were within the same dynamic range. The fact that a group shape or individual shape must be held long enough to be grasped by the eye of the viewer tends to slow movement down. This is necessary, however, if the portrayal of shape is to dominate energy or movement quality, as the addition of dynamics seems to shift the attention away from shape to the use of energy.

To avoid losing the pulse of Section II due to this problem, instead of dynamics, this choreographer used a strong motivation for going into the three total-group shapes. The impulse to move from one shape into another came from the kinetic desire to use the arm or torso to draw an arc in the air in differing directions and planes. The movement motivation replaced the need for arbitrarily imposed dynamic quality and the pulse of the work was not sacrificed.

To make up for the lack of dynamics at such points in a work designed to emphasize shape, it is urgent that the

shapes themselves be so engaging and intriguing that the lack of movement is not missed. The fact that group shapes are in the same spatial proximity, during and after transitions, becomes a problem of holding the viewer's eye to one general spot in space. Such a spatial problem is also overcome by making sure that the design is so provocative that the eye is held with unwaning interest.

Another device also helpful in solving the dynamics problem during the construction of group shapes was to separate the five dancers into two groups, thereby creating contrast and using the size of the group as a dynamic element. Partner relationship in each of these groups was specifically oriented to shape and design, however, the relationship between the two differently shaped groups provided the dynamic contrast needed by creating a spatial tension between them.

In using these two groups another useful device was to have one dancer designated to utilize much space and energy at the time the other four were engaged in shape patterns in a stationary position. At times the dynamic contrast in this situation is the climax of the whole dance section.

Another problem to recognize in dynamics resulting when two group patterns are used simultaneously is that the height and size of the dancers either enhance or diminish the movement dynamics by the sheer fact that the same movements become stronger and more prominent on large dancers. To achieve the desired balance between the two or more groups,

consideration must be given to the relative size of the dancers.

Differences in sexes created another problem in trying to avoid emotional overtones while making group patterns within the choreography of an abstract dance. When a male and a female make a spatial design with two bodies, extreme care must be used in evaluating whether there are Freudian overtones which might get in the way of the design idea. When using one male and two females, or the converse of the situation, groupings must be screened which might "throw the viewer a curve" by having him see a "love triangle" in the partner relationship. The pure movement or group spatial design must be planned for mixed dancers with a clear emphasis on the desired effect of the designs and with a discerning eye to delete where necessary patterns which get in the way of the dance idea.

Another problem discerned in designing group shapes which is possibly the most easily recognizable for the choreographer but the most difficult to remedy is that of phrasing shape patterns successfully. Since there is inherent in a shape pattern sequence a stillness while the shape makes an imprint on the viewer's mind, phrasing of the shape sequences which are only broken by transition patterns becomes quite a project for the creator. Remembering that a phrase must have a definite beginning, middle, and end to it, the choreographer must consider it imperative to keep his shaping patterns into

this format so as not to overuse group shapes consecutively formed, without making sure that it falls into a comfortable unit. It seems that the kind of phrasing that would be useful in this instance would be kinetic phrasing, which is based on a natural instinct that humans feel of a relationship between effort and rest. In using kinetic phrasing for compositional purposes it is helpful to alternate between phrases that all dancers would feel concurrently and phrases that individual dancers would feel which would not have the same beginnings and endings in time. Somewhere between these two ways of making interesting phrasing sequences is the situation the choreographer creates where two or more groups on stage would find their phrasing overlapping with other groups for added interest and for a continuous flow during a dance section.

Such phrasing, kinetically motivated, gives an ebb and flow to the dance which keeps it alive throughout. Kinetic attack of a movement phrase leads it to its final resolution only to prepare for the next attack by holding the suspensional quality of the resolving movement or shape in readiness. The length of the phrases will vary in accordance with design, but always the attack-resolution-suspension-attack pattern keeps the dance section kinetically alive and pulsing.

The fewer dancers engaging in a group shape, the clearer the design; the more bodies, the more complex the design becomes. The creator, knowing what he wants the audience to see, can use numbers to advantage. Why is he so often



tempted to put all of the dancers on stage when one main movement or idea is the center of his purpose? What a lesson to learn that if a spiral should be seen, one dancer on stage with an engaging spiral is often the most effective and by far the clearest in purpose. Take away dancers from the stage and watch the dynamic quality change; bring them on and watch the tension build. A strong dynamic impact can be made with numbers, but the clearest statement of a motif or a design can be made by the few.

Shapes, both group and single, which are inwardly focused with rounded, blended body parts making sustained, successional movement for transitions offer the viewer almost embryonic tranquility. Shapes which open up with limbs away from the center in angular, oppositional design can unsettle the viewer, especially if they are unresolved or if the transitions are abrupt. Knowledge of the tensions inbred in certain shapes gives the choreographer an effective tool to use purposefully in creating or removing degrees of tension.

The direction a dancer moves across stage determines the amount of tension he creates. Whether he faces the direction of motion or not can enhance or break up the tension quality as well. How much stronger the dancer appears who enters from the Upstage Left corner and pursues a diagonal path forward to Downstage Right than one who retreats along the same floor space in the opposite direction. Even less dynamic is the Downstage dancer who turns to face Upstage

and walks away from the audience.

The total impact of a dance on its audiences comes from external sources connected to and enhancing movement. In selecting accouterments for the dance, the accompaniment, costumes and lighting must be artfully chosen to enhance the dance's impact. The total experience, being audible as well as visible, leads us to examine how the three elements can be used to good advantage.

Since the costumes in Umbo Suite were a white background with dark stripes on them, a linear design was always apparent which sometimes supported, sometimes contrasted the movement. The stripes added another dimension to body shape in the group designs whether they were stationary or moving. These additional lines on stage were as useful as a separate property since slight body shifts had potential to allow the viewer a kaliedoscopic range of linear design.

The use of lighting can add depth to the stage space, make movement seem bolder or subdued, lend a shadow effect, and can give added dimension in color. Care must be taken in selecting appropriate lighting effects, and the wise choreographer will allow time to experiment with several possible ways of using this special effect.

The role of accompaniment with silence or sound is important to consider because it is another tool the choreographer uses to add dynamic quality. Section I of this dance began with movement in silence to emphasize the pure movement

theme used. It came without any adornment of sound; and the pace was slow. The gradual crescendo built little by little as the movement began to speak for itself. Suddenly there was a haunting, atonal sound that began to accompany the movement as Section II began. The sound provided a dynamic enrichment and cradled the movement from the start of this section. As soon as Section III began it was joined in sound by sharp, angular notes and tension began to build through these joined forces to make this the most dynamic section yet.

In the middle of this section the music stopped while the movement pulse continued. This time the use of silence had the exact opposite effect from the silence in Section I, for now it was the absence of dynamic sound, and for the first time in the dance all five dancers had joined in forceful, angular, oppositional movement in unison, and it was powerful.

Section IV had only a percussive pulse for sound which kept the dance going and brought the tension quality back down to a comfortable level.

Section V, the longest section, used music again all the way through. The ebb and flow of sound qualities tempered the last section and allowed for a gradual crescendo of pulse. The movement still continued after the sound had died and finally came to rest in silence. Never could the steady use of sound from beginning to end of this dance have been so effective as the application of silence to sound.



Although here analyzed separately for their contributing value, these choreographic tools work concurrently and give a cumulative effect when used artfully. They serve a dual purpose, both as evaluative tools and as motivating principles in turn subject material into dance content. They served in both capacities in the formation and in the refinement of the dance Umbo Suite.

## PHOTOGRAPHIC DATA

## Videotape

Distance of camera to stage ..... 46 feet

Lighting ..... Regular studio lighting with additional stage lights. Additional lights: PJ Spots at each leg except upstage right where there were none because of excessive natural lights and upstage left where there were two PJ Spots to balance the other lights.

Camera make and number ..... Sony Videocamera AVC3200  
equipped with Electric Viewfinder  
AVF3200

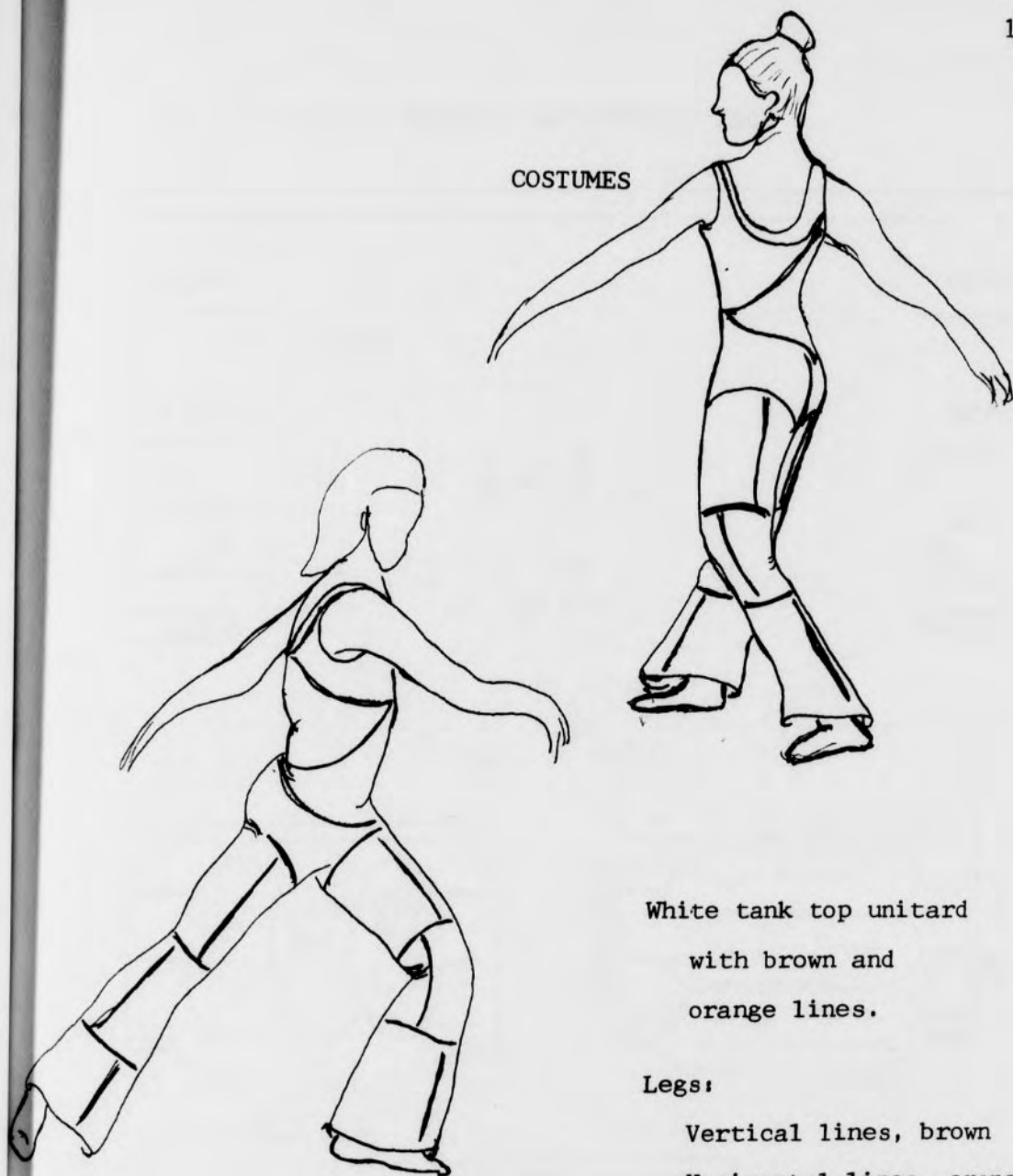
Lens ..... F/1.8 16 mm.

Tape size ..... Sony  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch tape

Videocorder make and number ..... Sony AV-3600

Sound process ..... input: 0.5-2V(p-p), 75

## COSTUMES

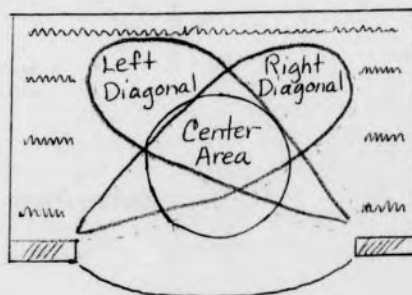
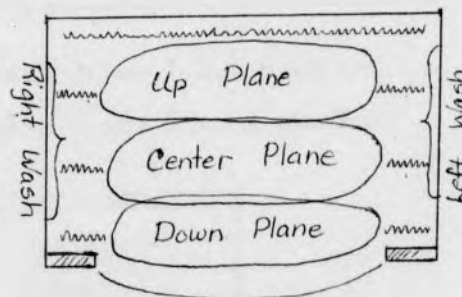
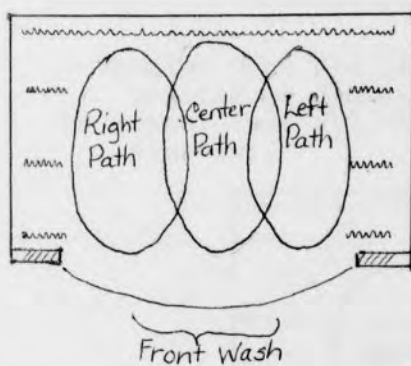
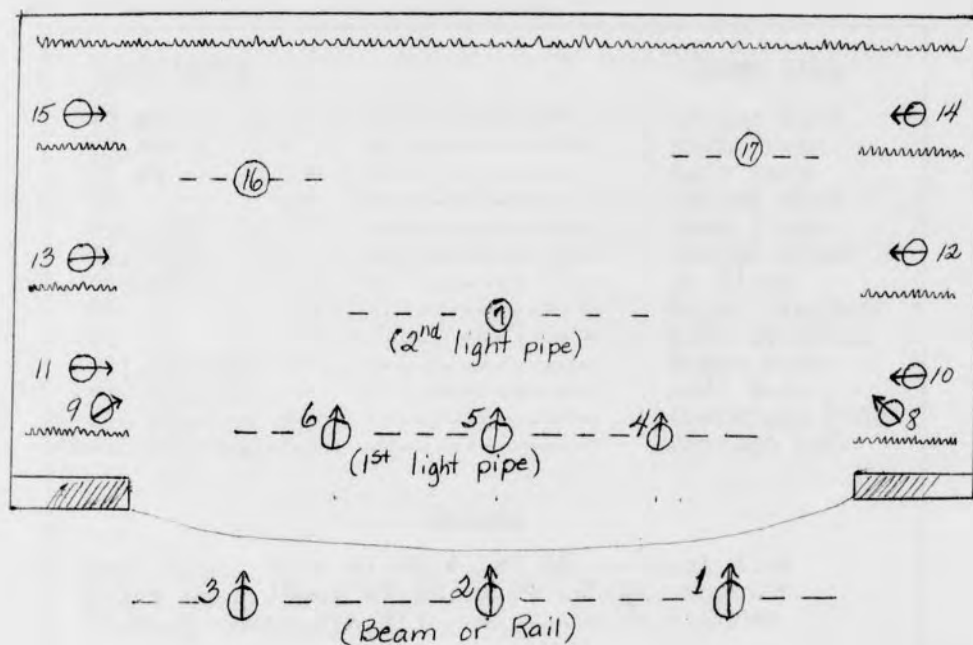


White tank top unitard  
with brown and  
orange lines.

## Legs:

Vertical lines, brown  
Horizontal lines, orange

## CURTAIN AND LIGHTING PLOT



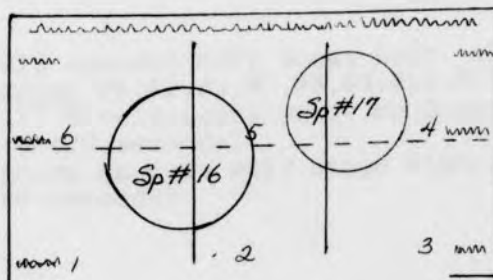
General Lighting:

<u>Spotlights</u>		<u>Stage Area</u>
#2, #5	-----	Center Path
#3, #6	-----	Right Path
#1, #4	-----	Left Path
#7	-----	Center Area
#11, #10	-----	Down Plane
#12, #13	-----	Center Plane
#14, #15	-----	Up Plane
#9	-----	Right Diagonal
#8	-----	Left Diagonal
#11, #13, #15	-----	Right Wash
#10, #12, #14	-----	Left Wash
* #16 Special Spot	-----	Downstage Right
**#17 Special Spot	-----	Upstage Left

<u>Colors</u>	
Left wash, Spot #1, #4, #5, #7, #8	---Steel Blue
Right wash, Spot #2, #3, #6, #9	--Light Scarlet
Special Spots #16, #17	-----Straw

- \* Special Spot #16 hits stage areas 1, 2, 5, 6 in an eight-foot diameter.
- \*\* Special Spot #17 hits areas 4 and 5 in a six-foot diameter.

Stage Set:

Black cyclorama

# Curtain, Lighting, and Music Cues:

## SECTION I

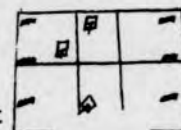
1. Curtain opens, moderate, on silence and darkness
  2. #7 0-6 (18 seconds)
  3. Dance begins in silence
  4. When soloist begins to move, all lights to 0-6 (18 seconds)
  5. When second dancer arrives center stage with soloist, all lights 6-8 (16 seconds)
- Note: Special Spots used only when specifically designated
6. When all dancers become motionless on stage, #1, #4, #7, #12, #13, #14, #15 to 8-6 (16 seconds)

## SECTION II

1. Music begins
2. When all five dancers fall on stomachs and reach up, all lights 6-8 (10 seconds), Sp #17 0-8 (16 seconds)

## SECTION III

1. When all dancers separate and three of them roll offstage left and right, Sp #17 8-10 (5 seconds), then immediately to 0 (16 seconds)
2. Music stops when dancers are in position at right, with the two upstage facing forward in Stage Areas five and six and are traveling Stage Right



## SECTION IV

1. When all dancers exit Stage Left, all lights 8-6 except #1, #2, #3, #7, #8, #9, #14, #15 (12 seconds)
2. When all five dancers enter on Stage Left, Sp #16 0-8 (20 seconds)
3. When three dancers exit Stage Right, Sp #16 8-6 (16 seconds)

## SECTION V

1. Music begins with no dancers on stage
2. When one dancer rolls in from Stage Right, all lights up to 8 and Sp #16 6-0 (16 seconds)
3. When five dancers fall on stomachs and reach up, all lights 8-0 (16 seconds). Music stops
4. Curtain closes, moderately fast

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